

Digital “Legal Notices”

Article 17 - Citizen’s Petition

**Providing Arlington with more Options for
Satisfying
Mass Gen Law requirements**

What are Legal Notices?

Current Massachusetts (MGL) statutes require that various municipal actions related to elections, zoning, construction contracts, etc be widely published in the form of a *printed Legal Notice in a newspaper of general circulation*

How is Arlington affected?

The entities below currently, by statute, publish Legal Notices in the *Advocate & Star*, which is owned by Gatehouse Media/Gannett, and the closest newspaper of general circulation.

- ❑ Select Board
- ❑ Town Clerk
- ❑ Dept of Public Works
- ❑ Dept of Community Dev and Planning
- ❑ Arlington Public Schools

Actions by Gannett in 2022 regarding MA weeklies

- ❑ According to WBUR reporting in March 2022, Gannett announced the termination of print editions of 19 Massachusetts local newspapers.
- ❑ The *Bedford Minuteman* was one of these 19. The *Lowell Sun* became the town's newspaper of general circulation and the recipient of its Legal Notices, at a much higher cost to the town.. Bedford is also seeking permission for digital alternatives this year through legislative action.
- ❑ In the same Gannett announcement, 9 other local print editions, including the *Arlington Advocate* and the *Winchester Star*, were merged into 4 locals.
- ❑ The trend by Gannett regarding local weeklies is bound to continue.

What are the hard costs?

- ❑ A typical placement in the *Advocate* costs \$190 in 2022.
- ❑ If Gannett pulled the *Advocate* & *Star* out of print circulation, Arlington would be required to place legal ads in either the *Boston Globe* or *Boston Herald*?
- ❑ Presently, a typical-sized placement in the *Globe* costs more than \$900.
- ❑ With a possible four-fold increase in the cost of Legal Notices on the horizon, Arlington's annual cost for Legal Notice publication could increase from around \$10,000 to in excess of \$40,000

What are the soft costs?

- ❑ Fewer and fewer Arlington residents subscribe to the weekly *Advocate & Star*.
- ❑ Local-interest Legal Notices are not being seen by the people who should be seeing them.
- ❑ Deteriorates our local democratic processes.

Article 17 proposed solutions

*A Home Rule petition to the MA General Court to “Allow the Town to satisfy the MA General Court regarding Legal Notices by authorizing the Select Board to choose **two of five possible methods** for publishing Legal Notices.”*The choices will be:

- ☐ A newspaper of local or general circulation’s print edition
- ☐ A newspaper’s website
- ☐ Websites reporting local news or opinion which satisfy all criteria for digital publication set forth in G.L. c.4 section 13b
- ☐ A statewide website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices
- ☐ A town-wide website that may be maintained as a repository for such notices

